

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President.

#### REPEAL MEDICAL DEVICE TAX

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Utah (Mr. CURTIS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CURTIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the burdensome medical device tax. Originally passed as part of the Affordable Care Act, this ill-conceived tax places a 2.3 percent sales tax on manufacturers of medical devices.

Although Congress successfully suspended the tax, it, unfortunately, went back into effect on January 1, 2018, and is beginning to derail much of the progress we have made to foster job growth and innovation.

The medical device industry has a significant impact in my State's economy. It employs more than 4,000 individuals. Merit Medical Systems, Inc., a local Utah company, believes this tax could cost them over \$7 million, having a devastating impact on their ability to expand jobs and continue medical research.

The current situation is a lose-lose for everybody. Not only does it increase medical healthcare costs, the tax is stifling job growth of our best medical technology innovators and slowing the cutting-edge research that leads to breakthroughs in patient care and treatment.

Surely, we can do better for the American people. I call upon my colleagues to join me and, together again, repeal this tax once and for all.

#### MEDICAL DEVICE TAX BURDENS HOOSIERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MESSER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MESSER. Mr. Speaker, after a 2-year delay, one of the worst parts of ObamaCare went back into effect at the first of this year. The medical device tax prevents Indiana companies from innovating, expanding, and hiring. This tax was created when ObamaCare was created, and that result has been a burden for the tens of thousands of Hoosier workers all over the State, including those in Warsaw, Bloomington, Mishawaka, and Indianapolis. It must be repealed.

This tax is bad for patients because it drives up the cost of much-needed medical devices, and it is bad for workers because it makes America's medical device industry less competitive around the globe.

Fortunately, this week, some relief may soon be on the way. After weeks of debate and a lot of work, the government funding bill we are voting on this week would provide immediate relief by repealing the medical device tax for another 2 years.

This result will be good for Hoosier workers and good for Indiana's econ-

omy. In the long run, repealing the medical device tax will provide certainty in the marketplace and help keep good-paying jobs in Indiana.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the 2-year repeal of the medical device tax in the bill this week, and then continue working to find a long-term solution by permanently repealing the medical device tax.

#### WESTERN HEMISPHERE ELECTIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, the Western Hemisphere is set to see many key Presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections this year, and those will have far-reaching implications.

Sadly, one place where we know we won't see elections is in my native country of Cuba. The Cuban people continue to be denied the right to choose their own leaders. The system in Cuba is a farce. The President of Cuba—using that term loosely—is selected by the National Assembly, and the National Assembly is selected by the regime in what can only be described as a circle of corruption.

Raul Castro claims that he will step down and allow for a transition of power in April. The reality is, even if there is a so-called transition, the balance of power will remain with Raul Castro and the Cuban people will continue to suffer.

The U.S. must not give Castro any concessions until we see the regime meet the basic conditions laid out in our laws, U.S. law. We want to help the people of Cuba work toward freedom of expression; freedom of assembly; and free, fair, and transparent elections.

Then there is Castro's protege in Venezuela: Maduro. Venezuela is set to hold elections this year, but with Maduro in power, there is little that we can expect. Even if elections are held, Mr. Speaker, we know that it will be a fraudulent process, just as the municipal elections were last year.

Maduro's grip on the supreme court and the supreme electoral tribunal make it impossible for the voice of the people to be heard. The administration has, thankfully, taken action against Maduro regime officials, but there is so much more that we can do, Mr. Speaker. There is a severe food and medicine shortage in Venezuela as a result of Maduro's failed and oppressive socialist policies.

That is why ELIOT ENGEL and I introduced and the House passed last month the Venezuelan Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act. Our bill mandates a strategy from the USAID to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Venezuela. The bill also aims to fight widespread corruption among Venezuelan govern-

mental officials. I hope that our colleagues in the Senate will take action and pass this measure so we can get help to these individuals rapidly.

Mr. Speaker, Brazil is another country that has important Presidential elections this year. With public opinion at an all-time low, increasing public debt, and high-profile corruption allegations reaching the highest levels in Brazil, the country is at a crossroads.

In December 2016, the Department of Justice reached a plea agreement with Brazilian conglomerate, Odebrecht, for at least \$3.5 billion in global penalties to resolve charges of bribery and what has amounted to be the largest case of its kind in history.

Last January I wrote a letter to then-Attorney General Lynch urging the DOJ to disclose the names of the officials referenced in the Odebrecht case. I again followed up this month, but, unfortunately, the Department of Justice will not disclose the names of officials in Latin America that it knows to have been involved in these corruption schemes. It is very troubling because many of these officials could very well be standing for elections in the region this year.

Mr. Speaker, we worked so hard over the years to help root out corruption in these countries, and it would be a shame to set progress back if these corrupt officials are allowed to continue to act with impunity.

We will also see critical Presidential elections in Colombia this year. Colombia is still at a pivotal point in the aftermath of the failed agreements between the government and the terror group, FARC. Colombia still has a way to go in bringing justice to the victims of the FARC. With members of the FARC, a terror group, aspiring to government positions, I worry that FARC terrorists will soon be elected officials. Their so-called peace deal allows these terrorists to run for public office.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, this year will be a crucial year. It is crucial for the United States to be engaged and for election observation missions to monitor the electoral process closely to ensure that they are indeed free, that they are fair, and that they are transparent.

#### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 42 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.